8:Arensberg E-5 (1932-1934) 1937
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

755 776 [238] Thus, cures of cattle and human beings, as well, bring in the fairy-lore. The good people may take anything from hens to men and women. When they mysteriously sap the strength of a man or woman, leaving him or her sick or weak and listless, he or she is little recognizable as the strong helper and friend of former years. The vitality has gone out of him or her. The country-people can believe that 'they' have spirited away the real person and left in his place "some spent old man that they had with them for a long time". The real person is 'away'. Cures, both religious and responding to the fairy-cult, must bring him back. That does not [753] mean that they do not recognize what we might call natural sickness or disease; they do, only too well, from bitter experience. It means only that they have an explanation for it that infuses it with the associations they have about their belief.

776 For the belief in changelings, about which you all have heard a great deal, has its root in the fairies' 'taking'. In fact, it is sometimes said, as it was to Lady Gregory, that "all persons who die [761] are taken, except the old people". Only for them is death the natural course of events; all others have fallen prematurely into the power of the supernatural forces.

776 183 82 Thus we can see that the countryman's fairy belief is not entirely a catalogue of wonders, by any means. Nearly all the disturbances of his interests and sentiments can be brought into the scope

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

CHAPTER XVIII

SOME CUSTOMS AND BELIEFS. I.

With the many material survivals from the past which we have mentioned in earlier chapters there lives on an imposing body of customs and superstitious beliefs of which we can attempt to give no more than a summary description. They concern not only the visible world with its common elements and events—water, fire, stones, salt, iron, trees, cattle, crops, harvest, food and drink, birth, marriage and death—and the relics of former ages—raths or "forths," great stone monuments, stone axes, flint arrowheads, spinning whorls and "crocks of gold"—but also the unseen or rarely glimpsed world of giants, fairies and other beings. All the major processes of the farmer's year had their appropriate magic rites which clung to them from the beginning. Many of these superstitions are so deep-rooted that centuries of opposition from the Christian Church have failed to suppress them, and while it has driven some practices into secrecy it has been forced to take others under its protection.

This applies, for instance, to the cult of holy wells, which is, like the worship of stones and the veneration of thorn trees, probably megalithic in origin and seems to carry us back to the sunnier lands of the Mediterranean where the megalithic religion took its rise. It has been calculated that there are some 3,000 holy wells in Ireland: many of them are still visited, generally at the festival seasons which we described in the last chapter, and it is customary for the devotees to tie

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[p. 163]

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

312 strings of beads, rags or bits of clothing in the holy tree which
788 often overhangs the well, so that it may bear their ailments.
● 955 I happened to come across a well near Cork just after mid-
summer this year. Alongside were the smouldering remains
778 of a great bonfire which had been lit on St. John's Eve.
The visitors to the well, having drunk the water, walked three
times sunwise around the corbelled stone well-cover, and
taking up pebbles kept ready to hand in crevices, they made
the sign of the cross on certain stones which were marked with
deep grooves which generations of patrons had cut by the
same process. Some wells have old "cup-marks" instead
of crosses, and it seems probable that these pagan symbols
were made long ago in the same way as the crosses which
have replaced them. Their round completed, the visitors
[825] looked into the well, for if they were to recover from their
ailments they would see the trout which is reputed to live
there and to show itself only to the cured.

The virtues of these wells are many: they are believed to be efficacious in such varied complaints as eye-disease, lameness, toothache and in some cases barrenness The first Sunday of each quarter of the Celtic year is generally the visiting time, but perhaps on account of the weather the summer festivals, and especially midsummer, are most popular. Pins and other bits of metal are sometimes deposited in wells. Offerings are also made to certain trees in the form of pins stuck in the bark, each pin representing a wish. Special gatherings known as patterns or pardons were held at such sites on the anniversary of the patron saint of the district. Devotions were followed by dancing and games which often degenerated into fights. It is possible to see relics of paganism in the sanctity of such sites, and it is worth recalling that some of the more celebrated centres of pilgrimage in western Europe, like Santiago da Compostella, seem to have megalithic connexions.

788 The mention of cup-marks brings us to the superstitions
823 concerning the great stone monuments with which they are
778 often associated. A recent article in the *Ulster Journal of*

offending person. Similar stones have been used to work beneficent magic in the case of expectant mothers. Here the symbolism may be that of the child in the womb, but there are other cases where it is obviously phallic. Sympathetic magic would appear to be the explanation of another custom, that of carrying away in a cloth and making into various concoctions, some of which were drunk, the earth from the grave of a holy man. The drink was regarded as a cure for human sins or for disease in cattle.

The megaliths themselves are known to have been held in veneration as givers of fertility and curative agents. The same virtues attach to certain solitary stones, for instance some holy wells have " healing stones " which are used to touch the affected parts of the body. Standing stones with a perforation (" holed-stones ") are said to have been used in sealing marriage contracts. Megaliths are also considered the haunts of fairies, which, some students affirm, are to be regarded as ancestral spirits inhabiting the burial places and awaiting an opportunity to be born again. Alternatively it is thought that belief in fairies is a folk memory of ancient peoples of small stature. It is hardly necessary to say that belief in fairies is firmly held in many parts of the country: I have seen quite recently boys dressed in girls' clothes as a protection against fairy theft, for the " wee people " are liable to exchange their " changelings " for healthy boys—a belief which is perhaps an attempt to explain the high mortality of male as compared with female children.

It has more than once been my experience to be refused permission to excavate megalithic monuments from the owner's belief that bad luck would follow. Country people will not touch the trees that grow on ancient burial sites, for instance they will not even use fallen branches as fuel. This reluctance to interfere with the abodes of the dead provides a charitable explanation of the neglect from which many Christian burial grounds suffer. Incidentally it is worth remarking that archæologists have often shown by their discoveries that hazel wood and hazel nuts played a consider-

10: Browne D-5 (1893) 1894
ER6 Rural Irish ER6
Inishbofin

or the influence of the evil-eye; and that she had been told by some of the people that they had seen little men, dressed in green, and headed by two others dressed in black, running over the hills.

In a recent Paper,[1] Professor A. C. Haddon gives the following:—"In Innisbofin, Co. Galway, the people have a very firm belief in fairies. Mr. Allies, who resides there, informed me that one old man told him that he saw a number of fairy girls, dressed in brown, around him one day when he (Mr. Allies) was shooting rabbits. Mr. Allies offered £50 if a fairy could be shown to him, and £100 if he took a photograph of one. Mr. Allies has not yet paid away any money. Mr. Allies and his brother were quarrying a rock by the side of the harbour, and at last the men refused to work at it any longer, as it was so full of 'good people' as to be hot."

It is remarkable that the leprachaun does not appear in any of the fairy tales of these islands, though the fir dearg figures largely in them.

1. *Customs.*—The old customs kept up here are said not to be numerous. Wakes and funeral observances have been already referred to (p. 352). Beltane-fires are lighted on St. John's Eve, round which the people gather, and, when the fire becomes low, they leap through the smoke over the embers.

The custom of chasing the wren on St. Stephen's Day, so common throughout the greater part of Ireland, is said not to be known here.

There are two holy wells on the islands, one, Tober Flannain, in the graveyard close to Tempull Colman, in the townland of Knock, is reputed to have worked many marvellous cures; and the other, Tober Leo, on Inishshark, not far from the cloghan of the saint, is also of great local fame.

For the following note on Inishshark, I am indebted to Mr. Michael Lavelle:—

"There is yet shown a ruin called Cloghan Leo, in which he (St. Leo) is said to have dwelt; also fourteen stations, to each of which on certain days these people make a holiday, and pray there for the day. There is also a blessed well, called Thobar Leo, at which they pray; and after praying during the day, they go and sleep in the place mentioned above (Cloghan Leo), but it is now almost to the ground.

"On one of the stations is a granite stone which is hollowed out

[1] "A Batch of Irish Folk-Lore." Professor A. C. Haddon, *Folk-Lore*, vol. iv., p. 49.

11: Browne D-5 (1894) 1895
ER6 Rural Irish ER6
Kilmore

832 believed in, or at least spoken of, though not practised. It is called the spancel, and is thus described by C. O.[1]:—"This spancel, called in Irish 'stheioul dhrum agus tharragh,' signifying the skin of the back and of the belly, consists of a continuous band of skin taken from round the length of the body, viz. from the side of one foot up the outside of that leg and side, over the head and down the other side to the sole of the other foot, up the inside of that leg and down the inside of the other, until the stripe meets where it first set out; it is used as a love charm, and its power is believed to be irresistible, it being only necessary in order to secure the affections of the victim, to tie the spancel round him while asleep; if he does not awake during the operation all *must* turn out to the wish of the operator; if he does awake, he dies before the end of the year, so the poor desired one has no escape." The same author mentions several instances of this, which were said to have occurred shortly before he wrote (1841), one of which, the discovery of three young women taking the spancel off a corpse, is still remembered by some of the older inhabitants. There
312 are several holy wells in the district, but the most famous is the well
778 of St. Brendan, on Inishglora, the water of which is said to remain
823 sweet and pure if drawn by a man, but to turn bloody and become full of worms if a woman has the temerity to take it. Many tales are told of the misfortunes which have happened to women who persisted in drawing water from this well after being warned. There is now resident in Belmullet an old man who lived for some years on Inishglora. This man solemnly declared to the Rev. P. O'Reilly and the writer that he had three times cleared out the well after women had taken water from it, and that on each occasion it was "full of blood and corruption"; he also said that from the time he began to clean out the well until the job was completed no water flowed in, though it began to come as soon as the cleansing was finished. He added that if a woman were left alone on the island with only a male child of a month old, and she wanted to get water, the vessel would have to be held by the child's hand to prevent the water from becoming bloody.

[753] 2. *Charms and Leechcraft.*—Disease is often ascribed to supernatural agencies, and for this reason is often treated by charms or
● 755 incantations. There are several local "wise" men and women who treat disorders partly by means of charms, partly by herbal and animal remedies. In some cases the idea underlying the treatment

[1] "Erris and Tyrawley," p. 90.

11: Browne D-5 (1894) 1895
ER6 Rural Irish ER6
Kilmore

seems to be the transferrence of the malady to some inanimate object, which, if found, may transmit the disease to the finder. 755

Charms, &c.—For "the Rose" (erysipelas) the following is sometimes made use of, but to be efficacious it is thought that it must always be applied by a person of the opposite sex to the patient:—

The operator rubs salt butter into the part affected, and prays over it, this process being repeated twice a week. (Communicated by a friend, who has seen it employed.)

For the same—the old woman who performs this takes ten pebbles from a well or brook, one she throws back into the water, the other nine she takes to the patient, and having muttered some prayers over them she puts each down on its upper side (*i.e.* the side prayed over, and taking them up one by one, she rubs them on the affected part in the name of the Trinity, and of the *King of the Rose*. She then takes the stones to a stream and throws them in, praying that so and so (naming the patient) may never have "the rose" so long as the stones remain there.

The following is employed for a mote or piece of barley beard in the eye. The woman who practises this takes a clean bowl and a jug or cup full of clear water, she rinses her mouth with the water until it ceases to be sullied, when she takes a fresh quantity in her mouth and holds it there until she has repeated, or is supposed to repeat, some prayer or charm. She then empties her mouth into the clean vessel, and shows the mote floating in it.[1] Written charms for the toothache are sometimes worn about the person.

For a headache "head measuring" is employed; several old woman practise it. The cause of the pain is believed to be the opening of the head by separation of the bones. To cure this state of affairs. the woman takes a cord which she passes round the head, and marks the length; this done she mutters a charm or prayer and measures again, showing the patient that the circumference is now less and that the head is closed, a kerchief is usually kept bound around the brows for some time afterwards to prevent recurrence of the pain. There is great faith in the efficacy of the touch of a seventh son, especially in "evil" and ringworm. An Inishkea fisherman stated that on the islands it is believed that toothache may be completely removed and will never return if the tooth be rubbed with a dead man's finger.

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[1] I am indebted to the kindness of the Rev. H. Hewson, P.P., Belmullet, for the description of these two charms both of which he has seen performed.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

Co. Kerry, which is believed to date from the sixth or seventh century. Whether or not the origin of this style of building in western Europe should be placed, as I am inclined to believe, in the megalithic period, there can be no doubt that it represents, in various parts of the Mediterranean-Atlantic route, the survival of an ancient method of building. It has had a long life in exposed hilly districts where suitable materials lay to hand, especially where the interests of simple shepherds and cattlemen were dominant. Villages of houses with domed or conical stone or mud-brick roofs are a feature of south-east Italy and Syria, and of the dry belt stretching eastwards to India.

Some of the Co. Kerry farmyard clochauns are still used for storing milk; their thick walls are admirable for maintaining even temperatures. Their association with the pig may also be an archaic feature, for the pig was perhaps the first domesticated animal to be brought to Ireland, and although much altered in breed, it still thrives best in warm, draught-proof surroundings recalling the sultry jungles of its original south-east Asiatic home. The well-worn phrase about 'the gentleman that pays the rent' not only summarizes the role of the pig in recent historic times but carries a humorous hint of the veneration in which the pig was once held in southern and western Europe. Here archaeologists have postulated an early Neolithic matriarchal 'swine-culture', vestiges of which would explain the fact that the pig was the only cult animal of the oldest of the Greek mysteries, the Eleusinian.[1] Later pork became the favourite food of both the Roman and Celtic worlds. In parts of Ireland the pig is driven into the house for luck on May morning, and the pigsty figures in a strange ritual for certain cures, e.g., a sufferer from mumps should be led with an ass-halter three times round the sty! Further, there is surely a supernatural quality in an animal which is reputed to be able to see the wind! In many parts of the British Isles, especially in Scotland, it is unlucky to speak of a pig when fishing at sea. Superstitions about the pig are numerous in Scotland, and in the Highlands there was formerly a tabu against keeping pigs and eating pork. This was apparently true also of those parts of the north of Ireland which have had close connections with the Western Isles.

[1] C. O. Sauer, *Agricultural Origins and Dispersals*, 57.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

754 occurring on natural rock outcrops (Fig. 91), others ground into stone slabs resting on built-up foundations and termed altars, as at Inishmurray off the coast of Sligo. I have little doubt that they were the communal mortars of pre-Christian settlements. Their utilization as cursing stones continued into recent times. I was told of the example illustrated at Killinagh in Co. Cavan, that 'you would think twice before turning the stones, because the curse would come back on you unless the

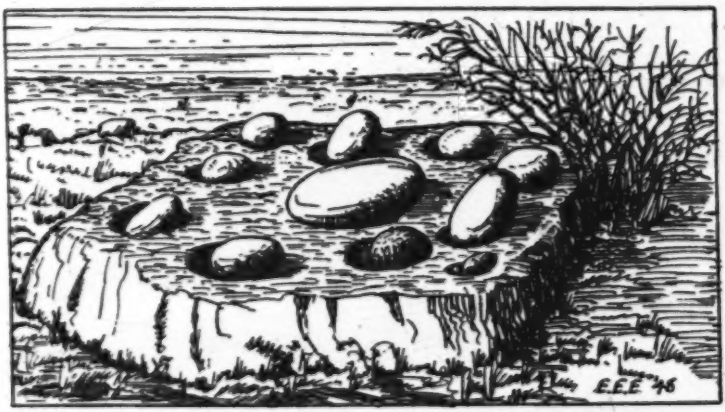

FIG. 91. Cursing stones by Upper Lough Macnean at Killinagh, Co. Cavan. (For scale, the large central stone measures 15 in. by 12 in.)

cause was just'. At many holy wells curiously shaped stones
823 were regarded as having curative powers, and they were bor-
● 755 rowed for use by people too ill to visit the well. At St. Olan's Well, Dromatimore, Co. Cork, the rounds include visits to the saint's Cap and Stone. The former is an oval quartzite stone which rests on an ogham-inscribed monolith and which replaces one, removed by the parish priest a century ago, which was invested with magical properties. 'It was said to be an unfailing talisman, and was much sought after for various feminine ailments, particularly maternity cases. If worn on the head and carried three times round the church it was said to cure the most violent headaches and, in addition, it had the gift of locomotion in that, if removed to any distance, it unfailingly

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

returned to its original position.'[1] St. Olan's Stone is a boulder bearing impressions which are regarded as being the imprint of the saint's feet. Many such marked stones, including some which are clearly artificial basin stones, have been regarded with superstitious awe up and down the country and were generally interpreted as the result of a saint's kneeling or standing on the spot. It is natural to suppose that these hagiological interpretations were substituted for another set of beliefs which attached the virtues of strength, healing and fertility to cup-marked stones.

Not infrequently cup-holes are found bored through thin slabs of stones, and these 'holed stones' are invested with aphrodisiac powers. We have referred to the ceremonies associated with the Ardmore stone in Chapter XIX, and the practice of erecting a stick or pole in similar stones at one of the major festivals is recorded from other localities. Wood-Martin wrote of the Hole Stone at Doagh, Co. Antrim: 'Marriage contracts are still ratified at this spot, as country couples go there to signify their betrothal by clasping hands through the hole.' Again, 'at the holed-stone of Clocnapeacaib, county Cork, women were in the habit of drawing some of their clothes through a hole, when their confinement was approaching, to secure a favourable result, and a similar practice is followed in many other localities of women similarly situated drawing clothes through the perforated arms of ancient Irish circular-headed stone crosses'[2] (Pl. 15, 1).

Before leaving this subject I should refer to certain cup-marks which have been utilized down to recent times for the purpose of making stone balls for the game of 'bullet-throwing'. Played along the country roads, and now prohibited in Northern Ireland because it endangers traffic, its main home is in Co. Cork, where it is known as bowling. One will occasionally surprise a game in progress in the Belfast hills or around Slieve Gullion in Co. Armagh, and it is here that stone bullets were manufactured within living memory. The 'bullet-holes', three to four inches in diameter and an inch or two deep, are worn in the flat tops of boulders in the process of hammering into a

[1] P. J. Hartnett, *Béaloideas*, 10 (1941), 108.
[2] Wood-Martin, *Elder Faiths*, 2, 239–42.

14: Westropp B-4, 5 (no date)1910-12
ER6 Rural Irish ER6
County Clare

Breeda, Miltown, Kilgorey, Fortanne, Broadford, Trough, Ralahine, Cragg, Lahardan, and Cappavilla, with perhaps, (if not of St. Molocus, c. 550), Moylough, Scattery, and Carrigaholt; *Molua* (c. 620), Killaloe; *Onchu*, Killonaghan; *Sanctan*, Dromline; *Scrobann*, Clondegad and Kilmaley; *Senan* (d. 552), Iniscatha, Moylough, Iniscaeragh (Mutton Island), Kilclogher, Carrow (Kilmaduan), Erribul (Kilfiddan), Kilshanny, Killaneena, Cooraclare, Kilcredaun, and Drim (Quin); *Tola* (c. 635), Dysert O'Dea and Kiltola; and *Voydan* or *Braighdean* (unknown), Kilvoydan, Corofin, and Kilraughtis.

Healing Powers.—The *Ordnance Survey Letters*[12] mention the following:—Gleninagh well, which has a fifteenth-century well-house or "turry," cured sore eyes; Tober Cholmain, above Oughtmama churches, sufferers from "the pearl," the films falling off the eyes at the third washing; St. Maccreehy's well, near Liscannor, eye troubles, which were also cured by St. Inghean Baoith's well near Kilshanny (even then nearly deserted), Tobermoghna near Clooney (Corcomroe), St. Senan's well on the cliffs south-west from Kilkee, Kilcrony well near Carrigaholt, Tobercuan in Kiltrellig near Loop Head, Tobershenan in Moyfadda, the Virgin's well at Templemaley, and Tober Isa at Corlack Glebe (Bunratty). Tobernatasha, ("well of the relic" or, as some say, "spectre"), in Kilmaley was shaped like a coffin, and delicate children used to be laid on their backs in it.[13] The black mud which gave its name to Toberduff cured sore eyes and swelled limbs. So did Senan's well at Kilkee; horrible to tell, the devotees,—down to 1875, at least, when a washing-tank was made outside the well-house,—used to wash in this, the only supply of drinking-water for the then fashionable watering-place. Toberlachtin at Kilnemona cured several diseases, its "day" being March 19th. Eyes were also healed by the well south from Newmarket-on-Fergus, and by the wetted moss of St. Mochulla's well near Tulla (the moss being put back to complete the cure). The latter well is said to have avenged itself, about 1780, on its landlord, who had dug away part of its enclosure, by rendering

[12] Library of the Royal Irish Academy, Mss. 14s 23. 24. (Co. Clare), vols. i. and ii.

[13] *Ordnance Survey Letters*, (Co. Clare), vol. i., p. 183.

16:Messenger E-4,5 (1955-1966) 1969 ER6 Rural Irish ER6
(1959-1960) Inis Beag

to put their property in a state of good repair, which, in retrospect, is regarded as a benefit, however much they might have complained of the labor involved during the previous weeks.

The sacred well, probably appropriated from the Druids 13 centuries ago, still attracts the folk and occasionally pilgrims from Inis Thiar and other islands. On the mainland, patterns often were associated with holy wells named after saints, but this does not seem to have been the case in Inis Beag. It was customary until about ten years ago for those who came to pray here to attach bits of cloth, rosaries, or sacred objects obtained from holy places of pilgrimage on the mainland and abroad, but this practice was halted by the clergy as smacking of paganism. Now it is visited for religious purposes mostly by small groups on Sunday afternoon, and by persons about to emigrate and their families who come to pray for the good fortune of the soon departed. The water in the spring is not considered holy, but capable of "bringing the grace of God and the saint," and if it is drunk during prayer, it is believed to be especially efficacious for curing sterility, among other afflictions. In this century, a partially blind islander is believed to have regained his sight after paying nine visits to the well on successive Sundays, and other miraculous cures from earlier times are reported. Those who come to the spring always seek a tiny fish or eel in the water, which, if observed, is merely a good omen to some but an assurance of reaching Heaven to others. Attaching rags to the well and seeking cures and omens there are all examples of reinterpretation. The spring also is used as a source of water by farmers who pasture stock in nearby fields and by thirsting passersby.

Pagan Supernaturalism

Pagan supernaturalism is disavowed by the folk, and it is difficult to know how widely held are beliefs in this sphere. That they are held is indisputable, as attested by the active efforts of curates up to this day to eradicate them. Youth of the island overtly deny the existence of other than church approved spiritual entities, although the most outspoken disclaimer of paganism among them is visited occasionally by the ghost of his father, who urges the continuation of a family feud. But elders cling tenaciously to indigenous beliefs and practices, about which they are extremely secretive for fear of being ridiculed by outsiders and their more skeptical fellows. Defensive about being labeled backward, the islanders feel that the "superstitions" they are said to hold most contribute to this impression. When the folk talk of pagan retentions and reinterpretations, they ascribe them to those who lived at the time that their parents or grandparents did, or to certain of their superstitious contemporaries. A notorious dissenter, who sometimes has occasion to patrol the shores of Inis Beag before dawn, antagonizes his neighbors by deriding them for their fear of venturing after dark to the back of the island, where fairies and ghosts hold sway. On telling him of my intention to spend a night resting atop a *clochán* near the Atlantic coast, he said, "The only thing that will happen is you'll hear the cocks crow in the morning." He is the only person who admitted to me that he disbelieves the teachings of the church concerning the soul

16:Messenger E-4,5 (1955-1966) 1969 ER6 Rural Irish ER6
(1959-1960) Inis Beag

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Figure 12. Copper-Bronze Age tumulus—home of the pookah

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black dog which roams the road by the Catholic church and cemetery in the village of St. Patrick, altering its size instantaneously (Messenger 1967:37–38).

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Witchcraft once flourished in Inis Beag, so it is held, but today only the casting of the evil eye still is practiced. The most common witch of the past was an ugly old woman, called a "hag witch," who was native to Inis Beag or a transient nighttime intruder from nearby islands and the mainland. She was able to fly through the air swiftly, make herself invisible, assume any size or shape, enter the body of an animal, and perpetrate black magic. Her favorite animal familiar was the rabbit and her favorite target the cow, whose milk she purloined after midnight from beasts pastured at the back of the island. Like the trooping fairies, she too stole the souls of children and left ailing changelings in their stead. When it was suspected by parents that a child was a changeling rather than their human offspring, it was customary to throw it into the fireplace or burn the bedding on which it lay in order to retrieve the departed soul; if the perpetrator were a witch, she would leap from the flames with a "wild shriek" and vanish, leaving the restored child in perfect health in her place. I was told in Inis Thiar of islanders there who bear scars from being burned when their souls were rescued by this expediency.

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Three Inis Beag persons are accused of possessing the evil eye and thus are shunned by their fellows. Such a witch is known by a disfigurement in or near his left eye, from which the malignant force emanates, and by his ability to cause

16:Messenger E-4,5 (1955-1966) 1969 ER6 Rural Irish ER6
(1959-1960) Inis Beag

misfortune to those whom he compliments. The extent of his power is measured by how soon after the compliment his victim suffers, and how serious is the calamity. Most feared of recent witches is a man who as a youth caused a newly arrived curate on his first walk of the island to fall and break his leg; within seconds after the boy praised the vigorous stride of the priest, "the poor creature disappeared behind a fence, feet over head." The folk seldom compliment one another, and when they do they append "God bless you." to the statement as a precautionary incantation. Persons with the evil eye neglect to do this, it is said. I often have wondered—when in a mood to credit the existence of fairies which turn on water faucets in the dead of night—if a series of misfortunes which befell me during 1960 and 1961 was somehow linked to one of these persons wishing me a good year, without uttering "God bless you.", as my wife and I put off the strand in a canoe at the end of our research. The same incantation is voiced by those in the vicinity of one who sneezes—in this case to prevent his soul from being captured by the fairies. It is tempting to attribute the unwillingness of Irish peasants generally to pay compliments to the age-old but now forgotten dread of being accused of the evil eye and of inviting fairies and hag witches to substitute changelings for human children.

Priests of the church at least a century ago rid Inis Beag of most religious practitioners of pagan disposition, but there is evidence that before their acculturative influence was felt diviners and workers of good and evil magic practiced techniques which had their roots in the Iron Age. Divining now is restricted mostly to the seeking of omens by everyone, and the astrological and tea leaf reading skills of several persons who do not charge for their services. The principal workers of magic in the past were herbalists, animal doctors, and bone setters; an animal doctor in Inis Beag and a bone setter in a nearby island still ply their inherited specialties for pay, but both men claim that they are practical folk physicians and do not command pagan or Christian spiritual powers. Just as the islanders share a common body of omens which are used to avoid the misfortunes and compound the benefits in store for them, they also share a common knowledge of folk medicines, which some believe to be more efficacious than the medicines provided by doctor and nurse. Indigenous medicines once were prescribed by workers of magic, misnamed "herb witches"—old women who gathered plants at dawn and "brewed" them in a variety of ways to affect various cures. The dew on the plants, as well as the manner in which they were compounded, gave these medicines a magical potency. To meet such a witch as she was returning from collecting ingredients meant that one was doomed to take on the affliction of the patient being treated by the hag. A similar belief, well represented in the folklore of the islanders, is the transference of disease from a human being to an animal that he has befriended earlier.

Christian and Pagan Reinterpretations

The four quarterly festivals of the Celts were: Imbolc, celebrated on February 1st, Beltaine on May 1st, Lughnasa on August 1st, and Samhain on November 1st.